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THE
DANGER
AND
Unreasonableness
OF A
TOLERATION:

In reference to some late Papers which have
passed concerning

LIBERTY of CONSCIENCE.

*He who breaks the Peace and Agreement of the Church,
sets himself against Christ.*

*They cannot receive the reward of Peace, who by their mad
discord have broke the Lords Peace.*

*Whereas Heresies and Schisms had their birth and origi-
nal from mens making distinct Conventicles for them-
selves, &c.*

*The heinous and inextinguishable crime of Discord is not to be
purg'd away, no not with Death. St. Cyprian, of the
Unity of the Church.*

*London, Printed for Walter Davis, in
Amen-corner. 1685.*

THE DANGER AND Unreasonableness OF TOLERATION.

A Man of ordinary Parts, and but meanly versed in the Transactions of these forty last years, cannot certainly but admire at the Request of some Persons, who keep such a noise at present for Liberty of *Conscience*; especially if he considers, that they know his Majesty to be a Person of *Experience*, as well as Reason and Judgment.

What manner of men these are who desire such a *Toleration*, is not hard to judge; but what is their reason for this their desire? Why, their tender Consciences, forsooth, cannot dispence with a few innocent and harmless Ceremonies of the *Church of England*, from which they differ in things not necessary to Salvation, as they cannot deny; but with which, rather than comply, (tho in things which they confess to be indifferent) they'l depart from her Communion, and continue in an endless Schism.

It is strange to reflect upon the many methods which have been used to reduce these People to Unity with us; and 'tis deplorable to consider the small effect, which the hard labours and solid Reasons of so many

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Charitable and Learned Persons have had upon these intractable Spirits. At the first time of our Reformation from the Church of *Rome*, such as thought not so well of many of our Ceremonies, were not yet drawn to such a dislike of our Church, as to separate from it, upon consideration of the evil Effects of *Division*. Our Church has added nothing since, to render it self more intolerable, and therefore this pretence to Separation can be no greater now than it was at that time, and yet the Clamour is daily louder against our Constitutions, and every Generation puts it self into a farther degree of Separation than the former, and all their Defence is *Scrupulosity of Conscience*. But we desire them seriously to consider, whether this can be a sufficient Plea for their Separation, (which now it seems they desire to continue for ever) will this clear them from the guilt of wilful Schism ? will their Ignorance be a Defence for them, when they have had all considerable means for their better Information ? have not all their Objections been answered, and the Constitutions of our Church, with solid (I'm sure unanswered) Reasons vindicated ? If they are not satisfied with the Reasons which are produced, why do they not answer them ? why do they not desire a more full satisfaction for their Doubts, in charitable Language, and with a desire to be resolved ? They have the liberty of the Press to set down their Scruples, and to let us know wherein they desire to be satisfy'd, as well as to vent Libels which tend to the disturbance of the Nation, and Mischief of the Church ? Methinks it should become Folks under such Scrupulosities as they pretend to, to be meek, and willing to be resolved in such Points as they differ from us (especially when the Peace of the Church lyes at stake) and to consider, that 'tis possible for them to be in the wrong as well as others. But the Disposition of our Modern Separatist

tist is quite contrary to this ; let the Publick Peace be ever so much concern'd, his Pride and Self-conceit (for which he has been ever famous) will not suffer him to suspect himself under a mistake, or to weigh rightly those reasons which are against his Humour. He thinks it a shame to be convinced of his Errour, and rather than shew himself confuted, chooses to persist in his Obstinacy, and desires a *Toleration* herein.

How pernicious both to Church and State such a *Toleration* would prove, is easily guess'd. We have not been ignorant what some Consciences at their proper opportunities can dispence with, tho in such cases as tend to Peace and the Publick good, they are extraordinary tender. Those that strain'd at the Cap and Surplice, could well enough digest Rapine, Sacriledge, and Regicide. *Conscience* and *Christian Liberty* were the specious pretences for their most Unchristian and Uncharitable Proceedings. I need say no more, than that the like Effects must proceed from the same Causes. Irreverence towards Gods Ministers, and Contempt of the King's Magistrates, are some of the least Evils that may justly be expected from the wonted Meekness of our weak Brethren ; and this would soon be every man's Answer, in case of being enjoyned any thing concerning God or Men, how holy or just soever it were, that did dislike him, that his Conscience is against it. If you please, you shall hear the words of a Presbyterian Minister, in the late rebellious Times, concerning the Dissenters at that time ; " That he was confident, " that for this many hundred years, there had not " been a Party that pretended to so much Holiness, " and tenderness of *Conscience* above all other men, as " this Party hath done, that hath been guilty of so " great sins, horrible Wickedness, provoking abominations, as they are. You may remember likewise, that his late Majesty, of ever blessed memory, at his

happy

Mr. Edwards.

happy Restauration, spontaneously condescended to grant Liberty of Conscience to such as dissented from the establish'd Religion, provided they would not disturb the Peace of the Nation ; you may think the King was in a fair way of gratifying them, and that the Conditions were but reasonable ; but how little operation it had upon the Dissenters, the Commotion of the Fifth-Monarchy-men did afterwards demonstrate ; as also, the following Plot of some of those men of *Conscience*, that were concern'd in the fore-going Rebellion ; which verified the Observation of King *James*, " That the men of these Principles are not obliged by kindnesses, nor won by frequently repeated favours.

But these Persons may do well to consider, what a number of Sects are likely to spring up upon this desired Liberty. There are many Folks who much delight in Novelty, and many to whom nothing is dearer than their own singular Opinions ; now when every man is thus free to set up for himself, we shall be daily pestered with new Doctrines, and every one will be seeking for Subscribers to his own Model, be it ever so absurd. There can be no better way of judging what will ensue upon such a *Toleration*, than by looking back, and considering what has followed already, when there has been such a Liberty ; and if we will consult the same fore-quoted Presbyterian Minister, he'll acquaint us with several Opinions that were maintain'd in his time ; amongst a great number of which, these are some ; " That the Scriptures cannot " be said to be the Word of God, and are no more to " be credited than the Writings of Men, being not a " Divine but Humane Tradition ; that God has a hand " in, and is the Author of the sinfulness of his People, not " of the Actions alone, but of the very Pravity which " is in them ; and afterwards, That the Soul of man " is

"is mortal, as the Soul of a Beast, and that there's no Resurrection at all of the Bodies of Men, nor Heav'n nor Hell after this Life. You may perceive hereby, how such a Liberty as this, of maintaining publicly whatsoever a man's depraved Fancy suggests to him, cannot but tend to the great propagation of Religion, the edification of the People, and glory of the Church.

But what do they desire under this name of *Liberty of Conscience*, or a *Toleration* ? Is it a free Liberty to stick close to their old Principles, and continue in their profess'd Opinions ? if this be it, let them reflect upon those Tenets that have been maintain'd among them, and which I hear not as yet recanted ; if these are destructive to Government, and tend to the upholding of *Rebellion*, it seems a little unreasonable for them to require a persistence in them. What they are, and how likely to produce Loyal and peaceable Effects, would be a long work to shew ; I shall only send you to a Collection of many of them, by a Loyal and Laborious Subject of this Nation, where you may have a full *L'Estrange.* view of the Separatist's Opinions, and where you are directed to their Author's ; You may also find some of them in the sheet that came out at the burning of *Seditious Libels* in *Oxford* the last year ; in both of which you may learn, what it is that keeps them in as good a posture as they are in at present, and that if they had power proportionable to their desires, (to the augmentation of which, such a Toleration must necessarily contribute much) we should have them fight the Lord's Battels, and try again to set King Jesus upon his Throne. 'Tis easily known who I mean, and 'tis observable, that there was never such oppression exercised over mens Consciences by Christians, as was by those who so much pretended to an abhorrence of Ecclesiastical Tyranny, and who have, not many years since, been sticklers for a Toleration.

I shall not trouble my self with answering any of those late Papers concerning Liberty of Conscience ; neither weighing whether they are in the right when they say, the great Oppression they are under is purely for their Religion, nor confuting that irrefragable Argument in case of Hypocrisie, to which men should be forced if they comply with us, nor examining what one of them says concerning *Qu. Elizabeth's* time, conceiving that none of these belong to my purpose, my intent is only to hint at the unreasonableness of their desire, and the dangerous consequences that would ensue upon it ; I'll only desire to know of them, whether it were not better (if it were possible) for us to be united, than to widen our Breaches ? I believe none is such an Enemy to Peace, but will at least grant me this ; if so, we beseech them to use such means as may conduce to it. They are easie enough to men of unbiass'd Affections, and unprejudic'd Spirits, that are Friends to Peace, and desirers of Unity. The case is plain and brief, the Constitutions of our Church are known, and wherein Dissenters differ from us ; our Request therefore to them is, that they would lay open the Reasons why they desire such an unbrotherly Separation from us, but we also desire them to avoid Repetitions, and that they produce not Arguments answered long ago, unless they give their Replies to them ; we desire them with unprejudic'd affections to peruse the late Writings of our Ministers, in defence of our Church, and to acquaint us wherein their Reasons are deficient and unsatisfying ; let this be done with a Christian Spirit, and a desire that their Judgments may be rectify'd in all things, and I doubt not but God (who is not the God of Confusion, but of Unity ; who is the Author of Peace and Lover of Concord) will grant us a Remedy for these sores, that we need not enter upon actions of utter Desperation.

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